

A small tonnage of staple finewool sold a few weeks ago in Texas for one dollar and two and a half cents a pound. I realize news of wool sales interests the hollow horn operators and the meat goat herders about as much as a line judge's job at the U.S. Tennis Open appeals to Mark McGwire. However, I think it is healthy for all segments of agriculture to share our misery, then split off on our own on the rare occasions when good times hit. After all, most of the waterholes and springs that the sheepmen and the cattlemen fought over in the old days have dried up.

On the way back and forth to the ranch, I drive through several straight cow outfits. All of this country once was dual species operations, running thousands of head of woolies and big herds of whiteface cows on the Spring Creek watershed. Nowadays, when we do have grass, more cattle are seen than sheep.

Plenty disheartening to be involved in a business so full of misery you can't enjoy a short drive from the ranch to town. Enroute, I am constantly reminded of our plight. All year long, right off the road is a preview of the current disaster.

If a windmill man turns in a gate going to the neighbor's, hauling a big string of high-priced pipe or rods, I might as well go fill in his name on the next check in the book. Help the same neighbor pull a calf one week, and all next month we'll be imposing on him to do the same

thing. Should a truck run through the fence on my brother's outfit on the highway, I might as well stop at the wool house for enough steel posts to be ready to patch mine the next week.

The ranch closed-radio circuit heralds plenty of commonly held grief. It is amazing, for example, how many batteries and starters go dead in the winter at the same time on days when it is critical to feed the livestock. No determinations can be made of the number of miles ranch pickups have been dragged by wives frantic to get the kids to the school bus. Had nature not ordained our homeland to be called the shortgrass country, "the big tow rope" would have been a good second choice. (For part of the seven years of the drouth of the 1950s, we parked a bobtailed truck on the hill behind the old ranch for emergencies. Visitors thought it was because of the danger of flooding from the big draw in front of the house, but the reason was the dreadful condition of the ignition systems of our rolling stock.)

Short time ago, an agent offered a special rate on an auto club. The plan provided insurance and wrecker services. I told the lady the protection I needed wasn't the same as her company's conception of road hazards. What I wanted was a vehicle guided by looking through a periscope like a submarine. My peril was not breaking down mechanically on the road, but from "breaking down emotionally" from the

sights off the road. Unlike most telephone solicitors, she excused herself in a hurry.

In the winter, I go out the back way through Barnhart. Ranchers over there seem to do better than in my neighborhood. As late as the middle of the day, their sheep and cattle are still eating on the big piles of cottonseed and bales of hay they throw out every day. Must be something to do with the amount of feed or regularity of the feed runs, as they ship a lot heavier lambs and calves than I do following a hit and miss program designed for the town and country type rancher. I learned a long time ago that on a 180-day financed operation, a three pound coffee can was a better measuring cup than a five gallon bucket.

The Australian and New Zealand producers took 57 percent of the dressed lamb market three weeks ago in the U.S. Australia, I read, has 400 million pounds of wool stockpiled and ready to ruin our prices for raw wool at any call. Sheep ranching must be the worst of all herder oriented diseases. Looks like a bunch of us are going to need a cure ...